

April 2, 2007

District Engineer, Mobile District, Corps of Engineer  
P.O. Box 2288  
Mobile, AL 36628-0001

Attention: Ms. Jennifer Jacobson - Project Manager

**Subject: EPA Comments on the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Draft SEIS) for the Proposed Gulfport Harbor Navigation Channel, Harrison County, MS; CEQ #: 20070051, ERP #: COE-E32070-MS.**

Dear Ms. Jacobson:

Pursuant to Section 309 of the Clean Air and Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), EPA, Region 4 has reviewed the subject document. The project evaluates the consequences of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) proposal to widen Gulfport Harbor Navigation Channel from 220 to 300 feet in the Mississippi Sound and from 300 to 400 feet in the bar channel for a distance of 10 and 11 miles, respectively. The purpose of the widening is to provide for safe and unrestricted navigation into and out of Gulfport Harbor. Prior improvements to the harbor included deepening the channel to 38 feet.

Two alternatives are examined in the DSEIS, including a no-action and action alternative (i.e. enlarging the Harbor). Enlarging Gulfport Harbor requires dredging and disposal of approximately 6.7 million cubic yards of material [3.8 M of new work material and 2.9 M of maintenance material]. The sediment will be removed using various dredging methods including mechanical dredging and hydraulic cutter head and hopper dredging. Three disposal options for the dredged material are examined in the Draft SEIS – Littoral disposal area SE of Cat Island, use of existing Ocean Dredged Materials Disposal Site (ODMDS) located on the west side of the project, and Placement in new Gulfport Offshore ODMDS south of Safety fairway and east of Chandeleur Islands.

Based on the information in the SDEIS, EPA has the following comments for the USACE's consideration on the proposed action:

***Section 2.2: Need for Proposed Action***

1. The need for the proposed action is not substantiated in the SDEIS with data. The document states that pre-Hurricane Katrina documentation shows frequent "waiting at anchor" status of many vessels entering the Port and that vessels often have to wait in Port while inbound vessel navigate through the channel. There is no discussion regarding the percentage, numbers, or types of vessels that have to wait, average wait times, and or level of congestion in Gulfport Harbor. The FEIS needs to supply more specific information on issues such as the "frequent waiting at anchor" status of vessels. A small table of number of vessels/month would be useful.

### ***Section 3.1: Channel Widening Alternatives***

1. The DSEIS indicates that the project will generate 3,804,600 yd<sup>3</sup> of new work, and 2,919,000 yd<sup>3</sup> of maintenance material. It does not include projections (30 year) of annual estimated maintenance volumes. The final EIS should include 30 year projections for annual estimated maintenance volumes?

2. The DSEIS states that "Any suitable material removed from the Bar Channel segment will be placed in the existing disposal site located southeast of Cat Island in order to remain in the littoral system." Is the "existing disposal site" the area identified on Figure 2-2 as the "Littoral Disposal Area?" What volume of material is anticipated to meet the "Any suitable material" criteria? What is the criterion for "suitable?" This information should be incorporated into the final EIS.

### ***Section 3.3.3 Alternatives Not Carried Forward***

1. In general, this section of the DSEIS needs additional information, and does not provide specific and or a substantiated rationale for the alternatives that are deemed non-viable. The FEIS should provide additional information on this issue.

2. 3.2.3.1 Thin-Layer Disposal - This section states that "It is anticipated the new work material located within the Mississippi Sound segment of the channel would consist of packed clays not conducive to this type of disposal, as clays would not spread throughout the open-water sites;" ... Hasn't the proposed new work material been sampled, tested and characterized? (Section 4.4.5?) Why is it "anticipated" that the material would consist of packed clays? If the material has not been tested it cannot go to an ODMDS. If the material has not been tested yet, when will it be tested? The FEIS should indicate when and how the USACE would know whether the disposed material is conducive to thin-layer disposal?

3. 3.2.3.2 Beneficial Use Alternatives Beach Nourishment - same comment as above. The DSEIS does not mention maintenance material being used for environmental enhancements such as beach nourishment. The FEIS should discuss the probability of using the dredged material from the proposed project for beneficial uses. It should also discuss the potential volumes of materials that will be available for this use.

4. Wetland Creation – The DSEIS does not mention of potential for new work and maintenance materials being evaluated for wetland creation. This information should be discussed in the FEIS.

### ***Section 4.4.5 Sediment Characteristics:***

1. EPA has not received a copy of USACE, 2006b document entitled, "*Final Sediment Quality Characterization of the Gulfport Harbor Federal Navigation Channel,*" Gulfport Harbor, Mississippi, prepared by EA Engineering, Science, and Technology, Inc. January 2006. This document should be included with the final EIS for our review.

2. The FEIS needs to include a table of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) values in sediments

3. A complete, separate, *Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuary Act (MPRSA) Section 103 Evaluation, Sediment Testing Report*, associated documentation, package and a letter from Mobile District stating their determination that the proposed material meets the Ocean Dumping Criteria, and requesting EPA's concurrence, must be submitted to EPA Region 4 in order for the proposed material to be considered for disposal in any of the ODMDSs available for disposal.

4. Toxicity Testing: Based on the water column test results using larval development and survival rates, the material from the navigation channel may not be suitable for disposal in the existing Gulfport West ODMDS. However, detailed information should be provided during the MPRSA 103 evaluation.

5. The actual data for the bioaccumulation test results that are designed to evaluate the survival rates of benthic organisms and the potential for bioaccumulation of contaminants of concern within the organisms' tissues should be submitted to EPA in conjunction with the final EIS for MPRSA 103 review. (See item 2 above).

#### ***Section 4.3 - Biological Resources***

1. Relocation of some of the noted aquatic species before spawning and into sections of the river which closely approximate their original habitat should be conducted. The DSEIS states that sea turtles will be removed prior to hopper dredging operations. EPA notes that other species such as the Gulf Sturgeon will also be removed via relocation trawling. The actual relocation should be overseen by a professional with proven experience in this type of operation.

2. To accomplish the proposed upgrades, a number of biologically important communities (seagrass, and essential fish habitat) will be adversely affected by the dredging activities. The DSEIS indicates that the project will result in temporary adverse affects to Essential Fish Habitat and temporarily disrupt mature fish and shrimp communities in the vicinity of dredging materials. We recommend continued coordination with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and commercial and residential fishermen dependant on these resources. In addition, the FEIS should define what temporary impacts mean (time frame and frequency).

#### ***Section 5.2.10.1 Threatened and Endangered Species***

1. The DSEIS states that the USACE is required to comply with an RBO for hopper dredging impacts on sea turtles. The FEIS should discuss how the "Screening of 100 percent of dredged material with a 4-inch by 4-inch screen" will be accomplished? EPA recommends continued coordination with NOAA on these issues.

#### ***Section 5.3.4.1 - Disposal in New Gulfport Offshore ODMDS***

1. This section discusses USEPA modeling of the proposed ODMDS and references USEPA, 2005. The reference listed Section 8.0 References is USEPA. 2005. *Water Quality Study of Bays in Coastal Mississippi Water Quality Report, Project #05-0926*. We are not familiar with this

report above, and not sure that this is the actual intended citation. Please verify this citation and indicate where it can be found.

Based on our review of this project, we have assigned a rating of EC-2 (environmental concerns, additional information requested) to the SDEIS. Every effort should be made to minimize the environmental impacts to biological resources, find beneficial uses to the extent practicable for the disposal material and provide EPA with the *MPRSA Section 103 Evaluation, Sediment Testing Report* to ensure that the disposal material meets the Ocean Dumping Criteria.

We appreciate your coordination with us. The EPA technical contact will be Doug Johnson (404/562-9386) located in our Water Division, while our NEPA contact will be Ntale Kajumba (404/562-9620) of my staff in the EPA Atlanta regional office.

Sincerely,

Heinz J. Mueller, Chief  
NEPA Program Office  
Office of Policy and Management